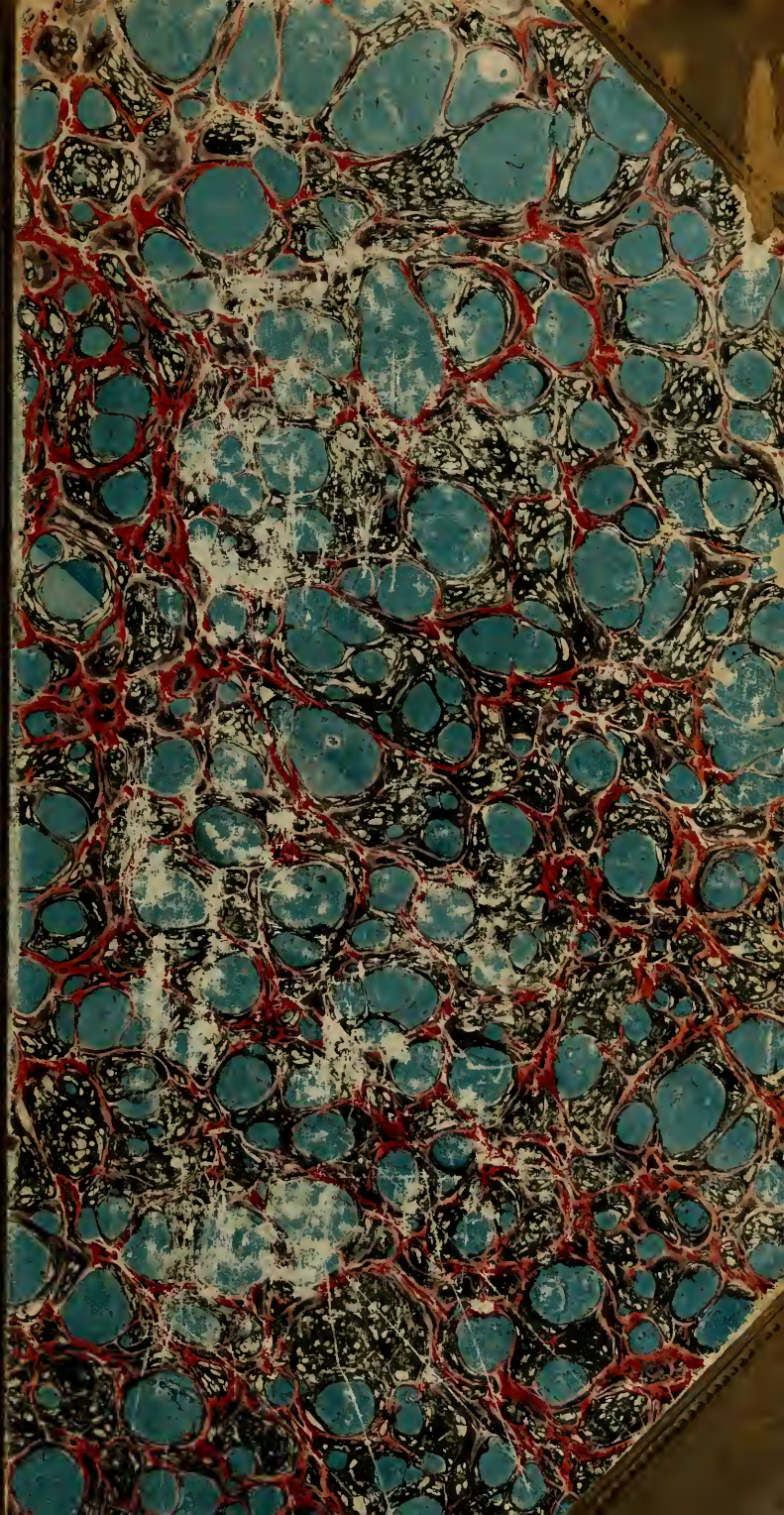






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THE BIBLE  
AND  
LORD SHAFTESBURY:

AN  
EXAMINATION OF THE POSITIONS OF HIS LORDSHIP  
RESPECTING THE

HOLY SCRIPTURES,  
DELIVERED AT A PUBLIC MEETING OF THE BIBLE SOCIETY  
AT OXFORD, ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27TH, 1856;

*In a Letter*

TO  
JOHN D. MACBRIDE, Esq., D.C.L.,  
PRINCIPAL OF MAGDALEN HALL, OXFORD.

BY THE  
REV. HENRY BURGESS, LL.D., Ph.D.,  
CURATE OF CLIFTON REYNES; EDITOR OF THE JOURNAL OF SACRED LITERATURE  
AND THE CLERICAL JOURNAL; AND MEMBER OF THE  
ROYAL SOCIETY OF LITERATURE.

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THE

BIBLE AND LORD SHAFTESBURY.

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SIR,

If any apology is needed for my addressing yourself on the present occasion, more than is afforded by your high standing in the University of Oxford, and your useful labours in Biblical Literature, it will be found in the facts that you were present at the Bible Meeting to which my letter refers, and took a part in its proceedings; and that, being, like my Lord Shaftesbury, a layman, you may be presumed to be better able to judge impartially of the matters to be brought before you than one of the clerical profession. It is *truth*, and not party interests, which I am conscious of seeking in what I am about to advance; and I would have the whole subject freed, as much as possible, from class prejudices, which, as they are inevitable, are, on that account, the more to be guarded against.

I should have been glad if a member of the University of Oxford had rendered it unnecessary for me to defend Catholic truth against narrow party assumptions; and could I have discovered that the task was likely to be undertaken in that quarter, I should gladly have declined what I feel to be burdensome, on account of my already heavy literary duties in the service of the Church. But, on the other hand, I feel that the occasion is too

critical to be left to chance for its improvement, and I cannot allow it to be doubtful whether Lord Shaftesbury is to be answered at all. I have an overwhelming conviction that his Lordship uttered almost as many errors as sentences in your hearing; and I should feel that, if the opportunity of replying were allowed to pass by without those errors being exposed, I should, in some degree, be unfaithful to the cause of truth and righteousness, and to the interests, as I conceive, of the Church of England. At the same time, if I am wrong, I share the mistake or the error with so many thousands of the clergy, that it will be a worthy object for any competent person to endeavour to set us right.

But let me not be mistaken when I say that I think the occasion an important one. There is a crudeness of expression and a want of thought in all the statements of Lord Shaftesbury at the Oxford Bible Meeting, which, *per se*, render it quite superfluous to examine them. But circumstances often give importance to what in itself is quite insignificant, and this happens to be the case in the present instance. Lord Shaftesbury is a benevolent man, who has had the happiness to originate and bring to maturity some plans for the lessening of human ills, and therefore he has some claim to be listened to whenever he chooses to utter his opinions. He is also considered the lay head of a large party in the Church, which generally endorses his sentiments. Further, at the Meeting in question, neither yourself nor any one of the members of the University present, expressed dissent from the opinions of the noble Lord, and you may therefore be presumed to have coincided with them.\* Lord Shaftes-

\* All our observations are founded on a report of the Bible Meeting, given in the *Oxford University Herald*, and copied into the pages



bury, therefore, does not stand alone as the propounder of the views I propose to combat, but is to be considered the mouthpiece of a party, some members of which are found in the University of Oxford. There are, moreover, other reasons which forbid his Lordship's opinions to be passed by as individual and peculiar to himself:—they have been taken up, defended, and praised by a portion both of the religious and secular press. Thus, the *Record* eulogizes the speech in the following high and exaggerated terms:—"Lord Shaftesbury's speech at Oxford has made an impression on the public mind, which is due not merely to the talent and high character of the speaker, but also to that ancient and venerable seat of learning where it was delivered." "The speech which the noble Earl delivered was weighty and powerful." "Standing as he did in the presence of 'a large attendance both of the senior and junior members of the University,' he did not fail manfully to express his belief that it had, 'in some measure, departed from the faith.'" "The salient points contained in the speech of Lord Shaftesbury are important for the times in which we live." So highly does the *Record* value Lord Shaftesbury's deliverances, while using the most lowering and disrespectful tone towards the University of Oxford at large. Of the latter I will give one specimen, and leave you to decide whether there is any truth in its generalization:—"A change has passed over the spirit of the age, and the cloistered palaces of learning have been too often profaned by those who, on the one hand, would

of the *Record*. As the latter paper corrects an important statement as not delivered by Lord Shaftesbury, we have a right to infer that the remainder of the report is admitted to be correct. The speeches of the other speakers are not given.

hide the light beneath the rubbish of human tradition, or, on the other hand, would impiously dare to sit in judgment on the 'true sayings of God.'” This sweeping censure is aimed at a few individuals; while the great facts of the case are dishonestly ignored. Who would think, on reading the above extract, that Oxford had recently produced such noble monuments of Catholic truth as the “Library of the Fathers,” and the “Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology?” Or that its presses had lately put forth such works as those of Greswell or your own? Or that its members combined had met Mr. Jowett’s opinions with the volume of Sermons on “Christian Faith and the Atonement?” But I must not enlarge on this topic, my object being now only to shew that Lord Shaftesbury’s public utterances have a conventional value, which redeems them from their inherent crudity and their mere *ad populum* character.

The secular press has joined with the religious portion of it in attaching importance to the Oxford Meeting. Thus the *Times* declares that “men of good sense and religious feeling throughout the country will support Lord Shaftesbury’s protest against a new version of the Bible.” We might be satirical on the subject of the *Times* being able to estimate the “religious feeling” of the country, but let that pass as irrelevant. It is enough for me to have shewn that, not in their intrinsic value, but in what others think of them, or in certain accidental relations, the opinions of his Lordship must be examined and weighed.

I will waste no time on a proposition which Lord Shaftesbury handled as if its confutation were a pet employment with him, namely, that the Bible is the book of the poor, but not of the rich; for I never yet

found, either in public or private, in print or orally delivered, such a sentiment maintained. The contrary indeed is the papal view, and the contrary might well be argued against such writers as Mr. Jowett, whose reasonings on the Holy Scriptures are, of necessity almost, such as the well educated only could conceive or discuss. I may, however, conclude that you have never found it gravely stated, "the Bible is not the rich man's book," and pass over the topic, which Lord Shaftesbury probably only introduced as a man of straw, on which to try his weapons, and warm his blood for more real and formidable antagonists; or as a windmill as preparatory for a less airy edifice. Laying, then, this subject aside, I find there are three distinct propositions stated and maintained in Lord Shaftesbury's speech, which I feel it my duty to discuss. *First*, that the Bible alone is sufficient to convert men, or "to bring them to the knowledge of the truth;" *secondly*, that imperfect versions of the Bible are as good as perfect ones, so that revision and improvement are to be discouraged; *thirdly*, that Popery and the worst kinds of infidelity are to be preferred to Christianity, when held with any modification of Lord Shaftesbury's views of inspiration. You will confess that these propositions, thus stated, have a very extraordinary appearance; but I think they are Lord Shaftesbury's nevertheless; if, in any degree, I have mistaken them, I shall most gladly discover my error. The order is not exactly that in which I should choose to discuss these topics; but as they occur thus in Lord Shaftesbury's speech, I will confine myself to it.

## I.

*The place of the Bible in the Christian System.*

Lord Shaftesbury says, in reference to the alleged imperfect versions of the Scriptures, circulated on the continent by the Bible Society:—"Cannot the Society point to the circumstance that thousands and tens of thousands have been brought to the knowledge of the truth by means of these alleged imperfect versions?" Would to God, Sir, that this glowing description were true! Happy should we feel, if by *any* means—and much more, if by the Bible—we could record the historical fact that *myriads* of souls had in our times received Christianity; for nothing less than this can be meant, we think, by the expression, "brought to the knowledge of the truth." If, indeed, this were an isolated instance of the use of the terms, or if the expression were not a proverbial and well-understood one in the nomenclature of Lord Shaftesbury's party, I should not venture to comment or reason upon it as conveying a specific proposition. But you will admit that, being "brought to the knowledge of the truth" meant, in Lord Shaftesbury's phraseology, being Christianized in a saving sense—being converted—being turned from darkness to light—being brought into a state of salvation. I should be sorry to misrepresent this matter in the smallest degree; but I do not think I am mistaken in this interpretation of the terms employed; especially as it is a well-known fact that the Bible Society always holds this language:—that Bibles are appointed and sufficient instruments for turning men to the knowledge of the truth.

When I state that in a long experience, from early

childhood through about twenty-five years of intercourse with the "religious world" in its various phases and parties, I have never personally known a fellow creature brought to a state of salvation by the Bible alone—when I further affirm that I never have yet *read* of a well-authenticated instance of such a fundamental revulsion of feeling produced by such means—you may imagine how glad I should be to be certified of the fact that "tens of thousands," within the sphere of the Bible Society's influence on the continent of Europe, had been so moved in the recesses of their moral nature by such simple and cheap appliances. But I *have* heard and known of many and great changes produced by reading the Holy Scriptures, some of which I will mention, lest I should be thought to undervalue the blessed influences which the Bible sheds around it.

*Inquiry* has been excited by the Bible, as in the case of the eunuch of Ethiopia, the Jews of Berea, and multitudes of ancient and modern times. This was the case with Augustine, when he obeyed the inward call, *Tolle, lege*; and with Luther, when, from treating the Bible scholastically, he began to study it devotionally and practically. I can understand then how Roman Catholics in various countries in Europe, when induced to read the Scriptures, may be led to forsake the errors of the Papacy, and embrace a purer form of Christianity. But all these cases are instances of advancing from one degree of knowledge and grace to another, and not examples of men being brought to "a knowledge of THE TRUTH."

The seeds of piety, implanted in the heart by early education, have been made to germinate more fully by the Word of God, and thus a revival or renewal of grace



imparted has been the result. The Scriptures are often like rain upon the parched ground, which, in its dry state, gives little indication that the husbandman has there ploughed and cast in the seed; but a genial shower dissolves the clods, and speedily produces fertility. A prodigal son, instructed on a mother's knee, prayed for and counselled by his father, and sent out into the world with the paternal blessing, forgets all his early privileges, and wastes his spiritual substance with riotous living. But in the lonely hours of repentant meditation he reads the Bible which love had placed in his hand in former years, but which had since been closed, and learns to retrace his steps and return to the paths of peace. The history of the Church abounds with instances of the revival of what appeared to be dead, but none of them can properly be called a bringing to the "knowledge of THE TRUTH."

In the records of Bible circulation, such as the reports of societies, and the narratives of agents, we often hear of men attributing their conversion to texts of Holy Scripture, and we do not doubt that decision for God has been produced in thousands of minds in this way. But in almost all such cases, the Bible has been, not the only means, but one among others, all of which have combined together to produce such a result. In fact, is there not, in most instances, a hand which gives the Bible, and a voice which enforces its claims and urges to its perusal? Even if we can credit the effects which are said to be produced by the Bible among the blood-stained insurgents of China, what is it that rescues its pages from neglect and destruction but a testimony that the book is the religious book of the Christians, and is



deserving of regard? We grant that there is an outlying mass of anecdote, and surmise, and hope, of various degrees of probability, in connexion with the operations of Bible distribution in various countries, from which we may gather that the providence of God *may be* overruling eccentric and wayward methods of operation to the extension of godliness. Papists profess to become Protestants; lukewarm Christians are aroused to more activity; men of but little knowledge become wiser; and the Bible, when read even by heathens, prepares them, perhaps, to comprehend the Christian system when regularly set before them; although, in some instances, heathens are prejudiced against Christianity by the bare perusal of its sacred books, apart from external teaching. All these phenomena, or, if you please, all these results, we willingly grant as following the free circulation of the Bible; but, unless we forget the right use of terms, can any of these warrant the statement that by versions of the Scriptures “tens of thousands have been brought to the knowledge of the truth?” Lord Shaftesbury’s statement, backed and explained as it is by the opinions of a large party of Protestants, amounts to this:—The Bible is, with them, the appointed means of converting the world, and therefore the first thing to be done is to broadcast the land with copies of the Scriptures, with the expectation that, like wheat from seed-corn, regeneration and holiness will spring up. The theory being believed, all phenomena are made to bear upon it, by a process inverse to the Baconian method; and the good effected by all other agencies together is at once attributed to the circulation of the Bible. The scheme is a taking one, and just suits the hasting to be rich of these mercantile times; but the

misfortune is, it is baseless—having no foundation but in the sanguine imaginations of Lord Shaftesbury and his co-religionists.

Were you, Sir, or Lord Shaftesbury, members of one of the voluntary communities of Dissenters composing, in great part, the Bible Society, I should not take the trouble to expose what I conceive to be the error in his Lordship's statement; for, among the legion of strange doctrines engendered by the misuse of private judgment, this is one,—that man needs nothing but the Bible to enable him to become a child of God, to choose for himself a community and a priest, and to convert the world. Nor, had the speech I am considering been delivered at Exeter Hall, should I have entered upon the task of unmasking its errors. But when a noble Lord, a member of the Church of England, comes to Oxford, and in opposition to the Church's doctrine, and in the very teeth of great divines and erudite scholars, maintains and upholds for theology the flimsy figments I am commenting upon, the case is far different, and will not brook neglect or delay.

The *Record*, in some editorial remarks upon Lord Shaftesbury's speech, has the following observation:—"The noble Earl appeared in Oxford as a member of that renowned University where he had himself in early youth earned within her walls the highest honours." He had therefore the less excuse for returning thither to utter a doctrine which his Alma Mater never taught him; for the uniform, earnest, and unqualified belief of the Catholic Church, has always been that it is THE CHURCH and not the Bible that is to convert the world. The Church, the witness and keeper of Holy Writ, composed of warm and enlightened hearts, is to send forth

its ministers to preach the Word, and by means of the truth which is deposited and preserved in the Holy Scriptures, to seek to enlarge its borders, found its sacraments and ordinances, and bring the wanderers into the one fold, under One Shepherd. Finding its commission, traditionally conveyed, confirmed in the Bible, and having its great cardinal truths consigned and perpetuated in the pages of that blessed Book, it has gone forth and conquered in ages when its doctrines and precepts could only be orally delivered, and when for converts to read them in a written page was an impossibility. The Word preached, and accompanied by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, has indeed brought tens of thousands, yea, millions, to "the knowledge of the truth;" but we think we could challenge the world to produce a hundred instances in which the Bible, without the Church, either in its direct or indirect moral and preparatory influences, has turned the soul to "God manifest in the flesh."

God's ways are the best ways, and it is perilous for Christian men to attempt to carry on His work by plans and theories of their own. "See," was the language of Jehovah to Moses, "that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount." And so, He who was worthy of more honour than Moses, gave a pattern and exemplar which his Apostles were to follow themselves, and to transmit by faithful men to the remotest times. The mischievous fancy that every thing which Christian men need know is to be found in the Scriptures, is an ignoring of that most remarkable of all providential dispensations, the planting and development of the Church. It is the growth of the last three hundred years, and bitter is the fruit it has produced in self-

will, endless divisions, and deadly heresies. Once admit this entire comprehensiveness of the Bible, and the right of every man to find his own system of religion in it, and the way is open for every wild irregularity, and every hateful doctrine. But Oxford has never taught this doctrine, nor, until ICHABOD is written upon her walls, can she ever promulgate it. The Church of England is founded on Scripture as interpreted and supplemented by antiquity, and not as explained by any private subjectivity; else what becomes of her Episcopacy, her infant Baptism, and her Liturgy?

At the time of the Reform of our Church, Cranmer and his colleagues were required "to draw an order of divine worship, having respect to the pure religion of Christ, taught in the Scriptures, and to *the practice of the primitive Church*;" and in the preface to their work they tell us, "Here you have an order for prayer, as touching the reading of Holy Scripture, *much agreeable to the mind and purpose of the old Fathers*." So in the office for ordaining Deacons, we read, "It is evident to all men diligently reading the Holy Scripture *and ancient authors*, that from the Apostles' time there have been three orders of ministers in Christ's Church." In the Twenty-Fourth Article, and in the Communion Service, the "custom of the primitive Church" is recognized, and in the Homilies, intended not for the Clergy only, but for the people, primitive antiquity, or Catholic tradition, is everywhere alluded to, and acknowledged as authority when not repugnant to the Bible. But surely, Sir, I need say no more to prove that our Church, while honouring the Scriptures above most Communions, does not exalt them as the only authority, or the only means of salvation, but gives them that place which they

had in the first constitution and early history of the Church. In reference to this subject we may quote the words of Professor Blunt, which I recommend to the notice of Lord Shaftesbury, and other Church of England favourers of the notion of the "Bible alone being the religion of Protestants." After quoting Jewell and others to shew the place they allotted to tradition, he says:—"Such was the language of the champions of the Church of England, while they had to defend her against the *Romanists*; and to vindicate against *them* the position they had taken up for her. And we may rest assured that if our Church is in fact constituted upon one principle, and we undertake to advocate her cause as if she was constituted upon another, we shall soon find ourselves involved in more difficulties than we contemplated."\*

We know that tribunals like that which Lord Shaftesbury appeared before at Oxford, will not treat our opinions, as they did his, with "warm and prolonged acclamation;" but we have learned to mistrust the *aura popularis*, and to seek a firmer foundation for our religious doctrines and practices than the noisy applause of public meetings. It will be said that such sentiments as I have advanced dishonour God's Word, and imperil the souls of men by discouraging the means ordained for their salvation. You, Sir, can defend me from the charge of admitting these consequences, since you have the means of knowing, from my writings, that the illustration and exaltation of the Scriptures is one great pursuit of my life; and that if I disagree with Lord Shaftesbury on this point, it is because God and not man is to point out the way in which the human race is to be saved. If

\* *Introductory Lectures on the study of the early Fathers*, p. 30.



I call the attempt to convert nations at large, or individuals composing them, by means of Bibles alone, a delusion and snare, it is because I believe the plan is not God's plan, and am deeply conscious that the cause of Christ is thrown backwards, and not advanced by such an unauthorized system. To translate and circulate Bibles in foreign countries may be beneficial prospectively, when the living Church can gain an entrance into them, though even this is doubtful; but to look to them as the means, alone, of bringing men to the knowledge of the truth, is a scheme devised by a utilitarian age, and will sink, with others equally specious, into merited oblivion. What would we not give to enable every man, woman, and child in the world, to read the Bible as we do in Christian England, or as they do in some Roman Catholic countries! But with the Word must go the preparatory institutions and influences, without which our Bibles would be to us sealed books. Timothy was first brought to the Bible by the Jewish Church, and by the "unfeigned faith" of his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice; and, when thus prepared, he approached the Holy Scriptures and was made wise unto salvation by them. I might dwell on another aspect of the matter, but will only now glance at it. How much personal exertion and devotedness in the cause of our Redeemer has been strangled in the birth, or checked in its growth by this easy and plausible theory of converting men by Bibles? How many more living missionaries would have gone out to reclaim the heathen, but for the doctrine that the Bible, going first, would either prepare the way, or render going unnecessary! Yet such is the delusion which Lord Shaftesbury's statements were adapted to spread.



The Catholic doctrine on the subject I am discussing is the following:—The Church preceded the Bible, both under Moses and under our Lord. The Church is the divinely-appointed instrument for converting the world—the little leaven which is to permeate and influence the whole lump. When men are brought into the Church, then they become amenable to the Holy Scriptures, which form the *statute law* of the whole community. As the Apostles did not give Bibles to the heathen, but preached to them the kingdom of heaven, so we know of no dispensation granted to modern times to alter that arrangement. The Bible all through presupposes a society established, having already what we may call a *common law*, laid down by our Lord and His Apostles; which, however, in all cases of doubt, is subjected to the *written law*, indited by the Holy Ghost.

It may be said that I have misapplied Lord Shaftesbury's words, or exaggerated his meaning. But if his statements are taken in connexion with the known and acknowledged principles and practices of his party, the charge can hardly be sustained. I feel certain that the impression made upon the Oxford audience was such as I have been combating; and if his Lordship meant to say that the "tens of thousands" alluded to, although brought up as Christians, were really heathens until the Bible Society had mercy upon them, he will escape the charge of teaching one false doctrine, only by embracing another at once false and uncharitable.

## II.

### *Revision of Versions of the Bible.*

I have stated in other places that there is only one

sensible, and indeed reasonable, view which can be taken of this question ; namely, that as most versions are confessedly imperfect, we should revise and improve them *if we can* ; the whole case resolving itself into a calculation of what is *practicable*, not what is desirable ; hence the importance of such revision will present itself with greater or less force to various minds, according to the view taken of the place appointed to the Bible in the Christian system by the Author of our Faith. If I consider the Bible as our *only* guide, or attribute to it the exclusiveness, as a means of grace, which Lord Shaftesbury does, I ought, as a logical inference, to be more solicitous about its perfection, and freedom from error, than when entertaining the opinions I have ventured to bring before you. There is thus ground for an *à priori* expectation that the Evangelical party will be strenuous advocates for biblical perfection ; and this is found to be a fact in their general exposition of doctrine. How then Lord Shaftesbury and the *Record* have been brought to fall back upon a view of the subject, which is almost the Papal one, deserves enquiry.\* But I will first leave on record what his Lordship actually thinks on the matter, according to his speech at Oxford.

With respect to versions circulated on the Continent, he considers that an exact conformity to the original texts must yield to another question : “ No version, as long as things remain as they are, can be made perfect ; but when men charge upon the Society a recklessness and indifference in this matter, they must place themselves

\* Some time back his Lordship declared, at a public meeting, that the Bibles of the Bible Society would be so much waste paper if a new version were issued. Can this *material* and gross view of the subject be the cause of his dislike of the revision ?

in the Society's position, and first of all ascertain whether, in the versions which are circulated by the Society, they could, or could not, find the way to everlasting salvation." That is, human expediency is to tolerate a little departure from the integrity of the Holy Scriptures. This opinion is further developed by an allusion to the difficulties in the way of circulating perfect versions, arising from Papal governments: "We cannot take upon ourselves the responsibility of adopting a new course, which may be opposed by the governments where now we have full freedom to introduce them; *and so endanger the everlasting salvation of the human race*" (!). I confess I was obliged to read these passages more than once, so utterly opposed did they appear to the often expressed creed of Lord Shaftesbury's party. With them the Bible is everything—the appointed means for converting the world; and yet its integrity is to be compromised for fear of human governments, on the plea that a measure of unfaithfulness still leaves to the Holy Scriptures the power of saving souls! With my view, which is that of the Church Catholic, souls can be saved without a material Bible at all—merely by hearing the Gospel preached by living men, and, therefore, whether the Bible is a translation of the Hebrew, the Septuagint, or the Vulgate, is a matter of minor importance, as was evidently the opinion of our Lord and his apostles—who quoted the Septuagint. But how Lord Shaftesbury could promulgate a sentiment so utterly adverse both to his lofty ideas of inspiration, and to his exclusive notions of the place of the Bible in the Christian system, is a mystery.

Does not Lord Shaftesbury believe in the verbal inspiration of the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old and New

Testaments, and also that the union of these two—the Bible—is appointed of God to convert the world? How mercilessly he condemns, and utterly unchristianizes, all who do not admit plenary inspiration, we shall see presently; and, therefore, there can be no doubt that I am rightly stating his general creed. Surely, the right argument for him to take on this subject would be, “Expediency must give way to divine law; there is only one way of doing men everlasting good, and that is by circulating the Bible among them: the Bible is one, the Hebrew and Greek originals, or exact translations. As then we are no where told that one part of the Bible is more important than another, we dare not circulate unfaithful versions, lest we should dishonour God, and ruin the souls of men.” This is the consistent view taken by the Evangelical party, which yet is laid aside by Lord Shaftesbury, as a matter of little importance. In other words, he neglects what he can see to be true, for something which he has no power whatever to dogmatize upon. He can tell, according to his theory of the Scriptures, whether translations are faithful or not, but he cannot tell how much or how little the absence of an imperfect version will “endanger the everlasting salvation of the human race.”

To make this part of my letter more clear, I will imagine that instead of Lord Shaftesbury lecturing at Oxford for the Bible Society, Dr. Pusey or Mr. Keble had been speaking at the same place on behalf of an institution for circulating translations of the Vulgate on the Continent of Europe. Cannot you bring before your mind, at once and easily, the abuse, the misrepresentation, the divers and strange charges which would have been brought against these divines for an attempt

so daring, so unprotestant, so decidedly Popish? Would not this have been looked upon as the crowning sin of the Tractarian party, that they were going to mutilate the Word of God, for the purpose of meeting the prejudices of Papists? Yet this is the line of conduct which Lord Shaftesbury defends when followed by the British and Foreign Bible Society! We meet with cases of inconsistency enough in our days, but this instance surpasses all others in its outspoken boldness.

Not only is Lord Shaftesbury's view opposed to his high conception of the inspiration of the Scriptures: it is in downright antagonism to his Protestantism. We can hardly conceive he could have delivered a speech more favourable to Popery if he had taxed his powers even more than he evidently did in devising the paradoxes propounded at Oxford. I presume Lord Shaftesbury would indorse this proposition, "The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, is the religion of Protestants;" which is indeed the watchword which binds together a rabble rout of sects and parties in opposition to Rome. But this principle is utterly relinquished in this famous Oxford oration; and it is conceded that an imperfect Bible, or a garbled one, is sufficient for the "salvation of the human race," or for "bringing tens of thousands to the knowledge of the truth." Sir, is not this a strange utterance for him to make who is thought to be the lay head of Protestants, next to Her most gracious Majesty? Admit that the Bible may be *a little* garbled, *a little* altered by Protestants to save souls, and what is to hinder the Papists from saying, We will alter it a little more, and divide it, and keep some of it out of sight; for, in our view, that will be the most successful mode of saving souls. As



the *end* professed by both parties is one quite out of sight, and known only to God, the adaptation of correct or incorrect Bibles to further or hinder it cannot be known. Such inconsistencies are produced by leaving the true doctrine of the Church, that that divine institution is the means of converting the world. Such follies are perpetrated by men who put their own subjective notions in the place of Catholic truth.

I come now to consider Lord Shaftesbury's speech in its relation to the Authorized Version of the Bible in English, and as it is probably the most extraordinary part of the whole performance, I will quote it in full:—

“There was another question agitating the public mind of late, but he hoped it was now pretty nearly extinct: he alluded to the outcry for a new version of the English Scriptures. Now he could conceive nothing more fatal to the truth in its Evangelical purity than to shake the confidence of the people in the blessed version they now enjoyed. What would be the first great consequence? One which he could not contemplate without the greatest dismay. The consequence would be, there would no longer be one version of the Holy Scriptures in the English language which would be generally and readily accepted by every denomination of Protestant Christians throughout the world. But another most serious effect would be an infringement of the great leading vital doctrine of the Protestant Reformation—the right of private judgment. The great masses of the people would have to pin their faith to this or that minister, to what this one thought or the other one held: there would no longer be a version on which every one could depend, and to which every one might appeal.”



Lord Shaftesbury here confesses that a part is better than the whole; that imperfection is better than completeness; that blemishes are beauty-spots, by all means to be retained. But this obliquity of vision is paralleled by the singular want of modesty displayed by his Lordship, in ignoring the labours of great and good men, who are anxious for a revision of the English Bible. Who would think, on reading this flippant passage, that the imperfections of our Bible were corrected in a thousand pulpits every Sunday, acknowledged in the writings of every divine, and lamented by great numbers of the clergy of the Church of England and ministers of all denominations? Yet such are the facts of the case: and so far from its being true that the "question is now pretty nearly extinct," there can be no doubt that it is being more than ever agitated; and that such indiscreet condemnation as Lord Shaftesbury's will greatly tend to keep the excitement alive.

The facts of the case may be told in a few words. Our present Bible is a revision of a translation,—a version which indeed had been revised again and again, until it took nearly its present form two hundred and forty five years ago. The translators, or rather revisers, in king James's time, make no pretence to perfectness, but speak modestly of their labours, as being conscious that they admitted of improvement. To suppose then that in two centuries and a half our venerable version has not exhibited faults in the light of all the learned piety which God has granted our country since then, is monstrously absurd, savouring more of the Vatican than of England in the nineteenth century. All sensible men, however, admit at once the imperfections of the version, and the only question that is to be entertained is, Is such

a revision as will remove the acknowledged faults practicable? In the present state of parties, it is thought that we had better "let well alone:" and as the English Bible contains all that is necessary for faith and practice, and is at least as perfect in relation to the Hebrew and Greek, as the Septuagint and Vulgate, we must submit to abide by that decision.

But very different are the representations of the matter given by Lord Shaftesbury: and all acquainted with the controversy will see that they are as unjust as they are onesided and ungenerous. He speaks of the divines and scholars who are advocates of revision as if they had designs upon religion and piety, instead of being, as I believe most of them are, sincerely anxious for the honour of God's blessed Word.\* For if it is thought worthy of men's best energies to improve the translation of a Greek or Roman classic, how emulous should we be of making an English version of the Bible as close as possible to the originals! Are not all the efforts of our Biblical scholars directed to explain and illustrate the text of the Bible; and if so, ought not the results of their labours to appear in our translation? Anything more really degrading to the Word of God we can scarcely conceive of, than this quiet and satisfied acquiescence in imperfection and error. Again we are reminded of the Vatican, and the self-complaisance with which Rome has ignored the faults of the Vulgate version.

I do not exactly know what Lord Shaftesbury means

\* Among many other excellent publications, I would particularly name *Notes on the Proposed Amendment of the Authorized Version of the Holy Scriptures*," by William Selwyn, Canon of Ely, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity. Cambridge, 1856.

by "the truth in its evangelical purity," but it seems it is something which cannot bear the light, but must be shrouded in common-places, and pampered with old saws and ignorant assumptions. But that there is nothing to apprehend on the side of old England's faith in the Bible, from any revision we can give it, will appear from these two considerations. *First*, King James's version was but a revision, yet we do not find faith declined when it was introduced by authority, unless Lord Shaftesbury thinks that the Great Rebellion and the overflowing of Puritan folly and tyranny proceeded from that cause. *Secondly*, if faith can be shaken by an admission of faults in our version, that has been made every Sunday, in half the pulpits of the land, ever since we were children, so that the mischief is done, if such a course is mischievous. I have been familiar from childhood with pulpit improvements and alterations of the English Bible, yet I never remember having my faith in its divine authority shaken on that account. Lord Shaftesbury thinks there is safety in concealment and darkness, and therefore he would convey to the people the notorious falsehood that the Bible is as perfect as need be; we, on the other hand, would preserve them from infidelity by giving them more light, and while confessing the imperfections, would teach our hearers that they do not affect the truth, because our Bible is but a translation. I ask you, Sir, which cause is more honest, Christian, and Protestant?

Then what an odour of Popery there is in the statement that it is necessary there should be "one version of the Holy Scriptures in the English language, for every denomination of Protestant Christians throughout the world!" Surely this is the spirit of the Vatican again; an inability to conceive of any good being done, or the

cause of Christian truth promoted, but by a level uniformity. Why, Sir, every Englishman who has a Bible with references carries two different translations with him, and has Protestantism ever suffered by this? The last statement of the speech, on this point, surpasses my comprehension, and I must leave it to others more skilled in platform platitudes to unravel its meaning. How the right of private judgment is maintained by a false translation, or how it would suffer from a correct one, are matters which I must leave to those whom the utterer of the paradoxes may choose to enlighten on the subject. As to people pinning their faith to this or that minister, as an error to be avoided, we are glad that Lord Shaftesbury is Churchman enough to be afraid of it. But this is the first time we were aware that the Evangelical party in the Church discouraged that easy and common mode of acquiring a belief.

But we have not yet done with this notable expression of a noble Earl's dislike of improvement and revision. He is guilty of a *suppressio veri* which, if uttered in the House of Lords, would not be considered in good taste, or in accordance with the customs of polite society. He speaks and reasons about a *new version* of our Bible, whereas he must be well aware that a moderate *revision* for the removal of confessed blemishes is all that any persons have advocated in this country. It was a bold step to present a bugbear to members of the University of Oxford, which any decent Christian man in a small provincial town could have detected as made for the purpose;—a frightful phantom to look upon, yet destitute of real tail and claws, and stuffed with straw!\*

\* Although complimented by the *Times*, Lord Shaftesbury and that Journal have already been appealed to in reference to their absurd

## III.

*The Doctrine of Inspiration.*

I approach the last part of my letter with feelings of more solemnity than I could entertain in the previous discussions; for while Lord Shaftesbury's statements hitherto have afforded a tempting occasion for irony and satire, what remains is calculated to make good men sad, and to excite painful emotions. Again I must avoid mistake, by quoting his Lordship's words:—

“Coming to another point, he felt bound to say none

*dicta* on this question. The venerable John Allen, Archdeacon of Salop, has written to that paper, and I will print the letter as an admirable summary of the case, and as a concise exposure of Lord Shaftesbury's sophistries.

“TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

“Sir,—I regret to see, from the report of Lord Shaftesbury's speech in your columns of Saturday, the weight of his name influencing the public judgment against the effort made to clear our admirable version of the Holy Scriptures from what all who are capable of looking into the Greek Testament acknowledge to be defects. The question seems to me one of plain duty. We must, as faithful men, do all in our power to give purely to our less instructed brethren the meaning of the original text. We must, as prudent men, seek to do this in the least objectionable way. It would, as I believe, answer every purpose if a royal commission were issued to ten of the greatest scholars among our bishops and professors at the old Universities, with direction to place in the margin such versions as seemed to nine-tenths of the commissioners preferable to the existing English text, permission being granted to ministers to read such corrections in our churches. By this I think we should get rid of the obscurities that arise (1) from the same English word standing for different Greek words, as in St. John i. 8, and v. 35; (2) from different English words standing for the same or cognate Greek words, as in Romans iii. 26; (3) from interpolation, as in St. Matthew xx. 23; (4) from change in the English



had arisen of late, or even in any former times, that he had ever heard of at all approaching it in character and importance. He referred to the question which touched upon either the total denial, or at least abatement of the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. Of all the machinations of Satan, one more full of malevolence or astuteness could hardly have been devised. There never was anything so well conceived in order to do irreparable mischief and promote disunion amongst all classes of the population. He did not know of a single thing so captivating to the youthful mind as doubts thrown upon the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures; he knew of nothing which so flattered the vanity of a young man, by making him think that he possessed a sagacity vastly superior to his forefathers, than those doubts which were so easily kindled, yet so hard to be eradicated. This principle met the mind in every possible manner, by various degrees and by various conclusions. Sometimes plenary inspiration was denied altogether, at others admitted in a modified form, and in other cases distinctions were drawn where none ever existed. But those who were

tongue, as 1 Corinthians iv. 4; (5) from a faulty text, as 1 John v. 7; (6) from not attending to the article.

"All who have read the Scriptures in public must have wished to read "Joshua," in Acts vii. 45, and Hebrews iv. 8.

"It does not seem desirable to leave corrections of the text to be made by ministers in their sermons.

"I am unable to speak of the Old Testament. Most have, as I believe, wished that the sacred name were always printed as it is in Exodus vi. 3. Some one has observed that if this had been done Socinianism would have been almost impossible.

"I am, Sir, your faithful servant,

"JOHN ALLEN, Archdeacon of Salop,

"Diocese of Lichfield."

"Prees, Shrewsbury, Dec 1."

opposed to it could not dispute, because they had no position, and they never attempted proof, because that would be impossible; some questioned partially, some questioned altogether, whilst others did not know whether to receive or reject. He knew of nothing which was more fearful than this in the present day, for it cut from under us the very ground on which we stand. It would be far better to plunge at once into ultra-Romanism of the most ultra description, or into ultra-infidelity, or even into downright atheism, than to stand in such a position. Far better would it be to adopt either extreme—for then there was hope of recovery—but when the ground was cut from under us in this manner we had no resting-place for the sole of our foot, and those who had been misled must go on wandering to eternity, without finding a single point or conclusion which could afford them rest or hope. He did not know anything which had so much alarmed him as the progress of those new opinions, because very few persons, when they came to be examined, or they could be induced to examine themselves, were in the present day found to be really sound in this great principle of the faith."

We might here dwell on the evident discrepancy between the speaker's high idea of plenary inspiration, and the way in which he throws that theory aside in advocating imperfect versions. But as I have already alluded to this, I need not enlarge on the topic, but will proceed to more important matter. The first thing requiring notice is the indefinite nature of the charge, including as it does those who deny the Inspiration of the Scriptures altogether, and all the shades of opinion on that difficult question, until we arrive at that which is held by Lord Shaftesbury—which, by the way, he does not

define or explain. He calls his view "the plenary Inspiration of the Scriptures," and we believe he means by that term, not the divine authority of the Bible as a whole, as the sufficient rule of faith and practice, but its absolute truth in every part, historical, geographical, and chronological, as well as religious. There is something in this confusing together of opinions, as far as the poles asunder, which reflects equally on his Lordship's skill as a logician, and on his Christian charity; and it is difficult to unravel his exact meaning. I will, however, comment on the language employed, as far as I can, in its plain and literal sense, and take for granted that *Plenary Inspiration* comprehends, in the opinion of the speaker, all I have just indicated. As this is the view maintained by the *Record*, and for the rejection of which divines are called neological and infidel by that publication, I do not think I am mistaken in doing so.

On no question, probably, have undoubtedly good men more differed, than on the nature and degree of Inspiration, and hitherto they have been able to do so without their orthodoxy being suspected; for in the doctrinal standards of the Church of England, and most other Churches, general statements have been employed, which allow of great latitude of opinion. In this feature Holy Scripture itself has been followed, which everywhere asserts its own claims in general expressions, which will by no means bear the stringent requirements of some who have written on the subject. It may be stated briefly, that for fifteen centuries the doctrine of the Church on Inspiration was, that the Sacred writers were moved by the Holy Ghost to teach Christianity, and that their writings thus possessed full *authority*; but it laid down no theory, nor denied a human element in the Bible, and,

as a consequence, allowed of circumstantial fallibility. As this subject is highly important, I will quote a few testimonies of the Fathers, and more modern authors, which ought to settle this question for ever in any reasonable mind.

The Presbyter John, quoted by Eusebius, says, in relation to the composition of St. Mark's Gospel, "he (Mark) was the interpreter of Peter, and carefully recorded all that he retained from him in his memory, without binding himself to the chronological order of the words and deeds of Christ."\*

Augustine declares that "each of the Evangelists has written, sometimes more and sometimes less fully, as each remembered, and as each had it in his heart:" and, "that the *words* of the Evangelist might be ever so contradictory, provided only that their *thoughts* were the same."†

Chrysostom remarks upon the words of St. Paul in Acts xxiii. 6, "He speaks humanly, and does not throughout enjoy grace; but it is permitted him even to intermix his own materials."‡

\* Καὶ τὸντο ὁ πρεσβύτερος ἔλεγε· Μάρκος μὲν ἑρμηνετής Πέτρου γενόμενος, ὅσα ἐμνημόνευσεν, ἀκριβῶς ἔγραψεν· ὃν μὲν τοι τάξει τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἢ λεχθέντα ἢ πραχθέντα (Eusebius, *Ecc. Hist.*, iii., 39).

† "Ut quisque meminerat, et ut cuique cordi erat." . . . "Quæ cum ita sint per hujusmodi evangelistarum locutiones varias, sed non contrarias, rem plane utilissimam discimus et pernecessariam, nihil in cujusque verbis nos debere inspicere, nisi voluntatem, cui debent verba servire; nec mentire quemquam si aliis verbis dixerit quid ille voluerit, cujus verba non dicit; ne miseri aucupes vocum apicibus quodammodo literarum putent ligandam esse veritatem, cum utique non in verbis tantum, sed etiam in cæteris omnibus signis animorum non sit nisi ipse animus inquirendus" (*De consensu Evang.*, ii., 28).

‡ Ἀνθρωπίνως διαλέγεται καὶ οὐ πανταχοῦ τῆς χάριτος ἀπολαύει, ἀλλὰ καὶ παρ' ἑαυτοῦ τι συγχωρεῖται εἰσφέρειν.

As I am not writing a treatise, these extracts will be sufficient to shew that the early Church, while entertaining very exalted views of the Scriptures, allowed a human element to the writers, with its consequent lapses of memory, and want of knowledge in matters not pertaining to the great object of their mission. We shall find the same concessions in more modern authors, whose piety and orthodoxy have yet never been doubted. I might quote largely here, but I prefer to sum up all in one authority—that of the Rev. T. Hartwell Horne, who, as a compiler, only expresses what he had found to be the sentiment of the orthodox on the subject. He says, in the new edition of his Introduction, just published, “When the Scriptures are said to be thus divinely (or plenarily) inspired, we are not to understand that the Almighty suggested *every word*, or dictated even *every expression*. From the different styles in which the books are written, and from the different manner in which the same events are related and predicted by different authors, it appears that the sacred penmen were permitted to write *as their several tempers, understandings, and habits of life, directed*; and that the knowledge communicated to them by inspiration, on the subject of their writings, was applied in the same manner as any knowledge acquired by ordinary means. Nor is it to be supposed that they were ever thus inspired *in every fact which they related, or in every precept which they delivered*. They were left to the common use of their faculties, and did not, upon every occasion, stand in need of supernatural communication.” Vol. i., p. 528.

As ultra-Protestants are often high and intolerant advocates for verbal inspiration, I will quote, for their benefit, and to lower their crests a little, a passage or two from Luther and Calvin, their “masters in Israel.”



Luther, in his Preface to Linken's *Annotations on the Books of Moses*, says, "Doubtless the prophets studied the writings of Moses, and the last prophets studied the first, and wrote down in a book the good thoughts which the Holy Spirit excited within them. But allowing that these good faithful teachers and searchers of the Scriptures *sometimes build with a mixture of hay, straw and stubble*, and not entirely with silver, gold, and precious stones, the foundation nevertheless remains unshaken; as for the other, the fire will consume it."

So much for Luther. Calvin is equally explicit. On Heb. xi. 21, he says, "We well know that the apostles were not so very precise in the matter of quotation; but in reality there is little difference."

I will close with an extract or two from Tholuck, who says, on the state of opinion on Inspiration in England: "A freer treatment of the question—namely, the limitation of inspiration *to the subject matter*—has from the first, along with individual advocates of a more rigid view, found place in the English Church. Several Dissenters also, eminently distinguished for their exemplary piety, occupy the same liberal ground. The Presbyterian Church of Scotland alone, has continued, up to the present day, to adhere to the strictest acceptance of the idea of Inspiration." Again, on the whole subject, he says, "It has been proved that the assumption of an inspiration extending to the entire contents, both to the subject matter and *form* of the sacred writings, has so little claim to the honour of being the only orthodox doctrine, that it has only been the opinion of, comparatively speaking, a very small fraction. . . . But what is of still greater importance, we find also throughout the Old and new Testaments numerous proofs of inaccuracy in

statements of fact. An anxious orthodoxy has of course endeavoured to rebut these accusations, and everywhere to maintain absolute accuracy. This has been accomplished, however, only by so many artificial and forced supports, that the Scripture, set right after this fashion, wears more the appearance of an old garment with innumerable seams and patches, than of a new one made out of an entire piece. It is true that the adversaries of Christianity have fallen upon many discrepancies where none are really to be found; but in many places where we can compare Scripture with Scripture, we meet with difficulties where either the contradiction will not admit of removal at all, or but very imperfectly. If now, by an examination of Scripture in detail, we discover a human side, on account of which the Bible is not to be declared free from defects and errors, then the question is, How can a theory of inspiration, which shall be consistent with these phenomena, be established? We have shewn that by a great number of theologians, both Protestant and Catholic, a positive divine co-operation was asserted only in relation to that portion of the contents of Holy Writ which was *revealed*, or the truths which were the proper objects of faith.”\*

I beg it may be remembered that I do not express my concurrence with all or any of these views. I hope the numerous occasions on which I have advocated the full inspired authority of the Holy Scriptures against gainsayers, will render unnecessary any professions or reclamations on my own part. My object is to shew that Lord Shaftesbury has ventured to set up an opinion of

\* Tholuck on Inspiration; a translation of which by a competent hand was inserted by me in the *Journal of Sacred Literature*, for July 1854. I wish the treatise was available in a separate form.

his own, utterly unsupported by his own Church, or by Catholic consent, on this important subject. And for what purpose has he done this? To make worse than Papists, Infidels, or Atheists, all who do not come up to his own arbitrary idea of what Inspiration should be; or, in other words, to bring a railing accusation against many of the excellent of the earth, at the feet of any one of whom Lord Shaftesbury might have sat with great advantage both to his doctrine and temper. What less than this can be meant by his saying of "any abatement of the plenary inspiration of Scripture," that "of all machinations of Satan\* one more full of malevolence or astuteness could hardly have been devised?" Lest there should be any mistake, he renews his charge by saying that "sometimes plenary inspiration was admitted in a modified form," and then predicating of this his horrible sentiment, which *ought* to have left him no Oxford man to listen to the close of his speech: "It would be far better to plunge at once into ultra-Romanism of the most ultra description, or into ultra-infidelity, or even into downright Atheism, than to stand in such a position." !!!

I confess, Sir, that there is a wildness in these presumptuous denunciations of differing opinions, which on ordinary occasions would have led me to treat them as the ravings of delirium or madness; and, even admitting the sanity of the speaker, the gross confusion as to moral distinctions which pervades the statement might properly allow them to be treated with neglect and contempt; but, unhappily, they are accepted as gospel by others,

\* It is to be lamented that writers and speakers of Lord Shaftesbury's school pretend to such a minute acquaintance with the movements of the spiritual world, both in heaven and hell.

and a refutation is therefore necessary. Fortunately for the Church, his Lordship has conjured up another bug-bear on which to exercise his polemical weapons, for the shades of doctrine which he treats as heretical and damnable have the sanction of the wise and good ; and opinions which he treats as “ new,” are as old as the Church itself. Who could imagine, if not a little acquainted with the history of the doctrine of Inspiration, that the Bible itself lays no claim to the plenary or verbal inspiration which Lord Shaftesbury thinks the essence of Christianity ; but rather, that by presenting to every reader discrepancies and different accounts of the same events, has actually *compelled* men to dissent from such high-sounding theories.

I believe my own views of Inspiration are higher than those of many writers of the present day, but so long as those writers, or any others, admit the *divine authority* of the Bible in matters of faith and practice, I feel I have no right to question their orthodoxy, their piety, or their usefulness. How dare I, as a feeble mortal, soon to give account to my own Master, judge and condemn Christ’s followers because, in matters not revealed, they differ from my opinions ? If Mr. Macnaught, Mr. Jowett, or any one else, propounds views which bring down the sacred writers to a level with Milton or Shakespere, I consider he *does* thus contradict revelation ; and I have not hesitated to combat and expose such sentiments ; but if any Christian brother admits that *the Bible teaches a religion which only God could reveal, and in a manner which only the Holy Ghost could point out*, he holds all I have a right to demand, although he may think verbal inspiration a human folly, and greatly modify even that which is called plenary. *Where the Church has not decided*, it is an upstart conceit

for any man to venture to do so ; and we have seen that she allows the latitude which Lord Shaftesbury, in Vatican style again, calls dangerous and damnable. In the Articles and Catechism she treats the Scriptures merely in a practical way, as *authority* for her doctrines and ordinances. In the Nicene Creed she states that the Holy Ghost “spake by the prophets.” In the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent she says, “Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning.” The Bible is thus raised by our Church to a position of divine origin and authority ; a position perfectly compatible with views of inspiration remote from *plenary*.

What I plead for is charity within the bounds of Catholic consent and orthodoxy ; so that, while ourselves holding more, probably, than the Church has ever required, we should not make our superfluity the judge of other men’s shortcomings. Let it be made to appear, by Lord Shaftesbury, or any one else, that the Bible and the Church *do* demand a belief in the inspiration of every statement in the Old and New Testaments, and the case is decided, and all impugnors of the decision are heretical. But in the face of the notorious fact that such a demand is not, and never has been, made ; and that learned and devoted Christian men maintain a lower view of what inspiration is, it appears to myself an unpardonable assumption for any man to unchristianize his brethren on any such subjective grounds. Obedience to Christ, arising from a love to His Person and work, which would lead its possessor to prefer imprisonment and death to a denial of His Name, has been, and is now, united with a different estimate of the Holy Scriptures from that formed by a party in the Church. A recognition of the Divinity of our Lord, and His having made “a full, per-



fect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world ;” an entire confidence in the divine origin and supernatural continuance of the visible Church, and a daily dependance on the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, for aid and illumination on the road to heaven,—are perfectly compatible with a conviction that, in minor matters, the sacred writers were left to the ordinary resources of honest witnesses, with no motive but to tell what they knew to those they instructed. If this is true—if the dogmas of men on this subject are neither required by the Bible nor necessary for obedience to the faith or holiness of life—it may surely be asked of Lord Shaftesbury and his party, “Now, therefore, why tempt ye Christ to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples ?

What does Lord Shaftesbury mean by affirming that, without his notion of plenary inspiration, a Christian man cannot dispute, because he has no position,—that he never attempts proof, because that would be impossible,—that the ground is cut from under him, and he has no resting place for the sole of his foot ? I have attempted again and again to conceive of some modicum of truth in these strange propositions ; but the more I reflect, the stronger is my conviction that the statements are as dangerous as they are unwarranted and uncharitable. Surely if every doctrine, every precept, and every prophecy, found in the Gospels and the Epistles are thoroughly believed as indited under the promised aid of the Holy Ghost, a foundation is laid for the defence of Christianity against all enemies and gainsayers, to which an assertion of the entire truth of every circumstantial statement of fact would add very little strength indeed. These, Sir, are the buttresses of our holy religion, the

miracles, the prophecies, the revealed doctrines, which the Church has borne witness to now for eighteen centuries, and against which the gates of hell have not prevailed; but, in Lord Shaftesbury's logic, all these are nothing at all,—they allow of no firm position, and admit of no reasoning and proof in regard to the great concerns of salvation, unless they can be propped up by the weak and insignificant aid of every disputed text or doubtful assertion! When I read such reasonings, when I hear such dogmatism, I have before me puny mortals endeavouring to prop up the everlasting hills with human masonry, lest they should topple down after their majestic reign for unknown ages; or superstitious Romanists, endeavouring to give greater durability to St Peter's in the holy city, by the bones and ragged vestments of departed saints! So far from Christianity being aided by such claims for entire infallibility, it is, in my opinion, weakened and injured; because reason is discouraged in its proper province, and scepticism is supplied with abundant food.

A young man reads his Bible prayerfully, and endeavours to study it so as to fit himself for the ministry of the Gospel. He meets with an apparent discrepancy in the Evangelists, and asks his tutor to solve the difficulty for him. According as the tutor may be himself a believer in the Catholic or the modern view of Inspiration will be the kind of guidance he will afford. We will suppose that he is the latter, and that the question propounded by his pupil relates to the varied accounts of the exclamation of the disciples when in danger of shipwreck. St. Matthew gives the words, "Lord, save us: we perish,"—St. Mark, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?"—St. Luke, "Master, master, we perish."

The pupil enquires, "You have taught me that every word of Holy Scripture is true in the nature of things, and yet I find three versions of what must originally have been one speech: How can these things be reconciled?" The teacher replies, Such doubts are to be repressed, for they "cut from under you the very ground on which you stand;" and with such cavils and questionings, you will be in a worse position than "an ultra-Romanist of the most ultra-description, an ultra-infidel, or even a downright Atheist." Or, if not quite so dogmatic, he may say, "The discrepancy is apparent, not real; for you ought to remember that there were several disciples, and no doubt the different cries of three of them are faithfully recorded." If the pupil is a meek subject of implicit faith, in whose mind no ardent thirst for the living waters of truth is found, he may be contented with this eluding or solution of his difficulty; and, in that case, is in a fair way to become a member of the Church of Rome whenever a clever mind may take the pains to proselyte him. But if, as the statement of his doubt implies, he is of a quick apprehension; he will soon penetrate through the sophism of his instructor, and say, Unless my objection is more satisfactorily met, I shall be compelled to be sceptical; for is it at all likely that if three disciples cried out differently, they would have adopted the varied appellations of *Κύριε*, *Διδάσκαλε*, and *Ἐπιστάτα*?

But suppose the instructor takes a lower and more moderate view of the Divine authority of the Bible, he will then reply: "These discrepancies are to be admitted as patent on the face of the text; they *may* be reconcilable, if we had all the information which the sacred writers had respecting the events they relate, and it is unwise to

presume what we cannot harmonize. to be necessarily a contradiction. But neither the Bible nor the Church demand us to believe that Inspiration extended to verbal identity, or to the exact conformity with what occurred in every particular. There is, therefore, nothing in such discrepancies to offer a stumbling-block to any right-minded Christian, content with what has sufficed for the Church in all ages. Hear how St. Augustine meets the very difficulty you propose to me. He says ‘What matters whether the disciples uttered any one of these three cries, *or other words which no Evangelist has recorded*, so long as what is related amounts to the same sentiment?’\* Build your faith on the great doctrines of Holy Scripture, as testified by the Church, and you need fear nothing from even greater difficulties than these.” This, I think, would be discreet and true teaching, and yet it is branded by Lord Shaftesbury in the terms I have already quoted.

I have mentioned Mr. Jowett, but I beg I may not be thought to place him along with Mr. Macnaught. Sure I am that, while I deeply differ from the former writer, I respect his genius and his piety, and think him used too barbarously for an enlightened Christian age. I have no doubt Lord Shaftesbury’s attack was mainly intended for him; because the *Record*, thinking him down by the blow of the self-constituted theological Peer,

\* Una eademque sententia est excitantium Dominum, volentiumque salvari; nec opus est quærere quid horum potius Christo dictum est. Sive enim aliquid horum trium dixerint, sive alia verba quæ nullus Evangelistarum commemoravit, tantundem tamen valentia ad eandem sententiæ veritatem, quid ad rem interest? *De Consensu Evang.*, ii., 24. I quote from Mr. Alford’s note on Matt. viii. 25, and take this opportunity of expressing the great service done by that gentleman in exposing the weak points of the Harmonists.

gave him a cowardly kick while on the ground. In that paper, in the leading article from which I have already quoted, while praising the Earl, the writer reviles the Professor in the following language:—"To the honour of Dr. Macbride and Mr. Golightly, the erring Professor was challenged to sign the thirty-nine Articles. He faltered for a moment; but, recovering his hardihood, bolted the test, and declared before God that he himself believes those doctrines which his own publications plainly contradict." This is the language of one whose mind is too coarse to distinguish between mental obliquity and moral depravity, and we wish he would come forth from his cowardly retreat, that we might more plainly tell him so. We give Mr. Jowett full credit for conscientiousness, and cannot but think that you, Sir, do the same. Unless we can search the heart, can we concede less to a scholar and a gentleman?

But, alas! not only are the days of chivalry gone by, when woman was protected by public sentiment, all over Europe, from brutal and ruffianly treatment; but in the Church of our Lord, the noble charity which "hopeth all things" seems to be falling into decay. Men like Lord Shaftesbury think they are called to pry into the secrets of the Divine mind; and, having such high endowments as to be able to tell who are saved and lost, the love which "suffereth long and is kind" is a grace too lowly for them to cultivate. When will the time come when the Christian republic shall have its code of honour as well as the world, and when the brow shall mantle with shame as we hear one Christian traduce another! That blessed era will, we believe, arrive; but it has not yet come; and when its first day dawns it will become as great a rarity for one man, whether peer or



commoner, clergyman or layman, to censure the brethren as Lord Shaftesbury has done, as it would *now* be impossible for him to treat his political opponents in the same way in the House of Lords.

I have no sympathy, I hope, with error; but I have for the erring, who are to be reclaimed by Christian tenderness, not driven to despair by severity. "Count him not an enemy, but admonish him as a brother," is St. Paul's injunction respecting those who "obey not the Word." That there is much evil abroad, both in the Church and without it, I am fully conscious,—there always has been, and probably always will be,—but it cannot be lessened by an ignorant dogmatism or an uncharitable insolence. God, in his inscrutable providence, has allowed these last days to be remarkable for an extension of the means of knowledge, and for a consequent general mental activity, such as probably was never before known in the history of the world. In proportion as knowledge has been increased, should have been the care of good men to exalt the Church, as containing the only counteracting principles to an intellectual licentiousness, —a grand *object* to outweigh an undue or morbid subjectivity. Instead of taking this wiser course, men have placed the Bible in the hands of their fellows, as an object sufficient for all spiritual wants, and told them they are themselves quite able to frame their religion from it. The result is, that men have obeyed the precept, and the popular mind is now acquainted with what was once confined to the learned, the peculiar phenomena of Holy Writ, and the nature of its evidences. Hence arises the necessity for a treatment of a new disease, which we may call an abnormal inquisitiveness respecting the mode of the divine operation in the Holy Scriptures.

Lord Shaftesbury would remedy the evil by a human theory enforced by intolerant and bigoted authority; he would maintain that the Bible has no discrepancies, but is throughout infallible, and declare those to be worse than Papists and Atheists who dare to differ from that view.

This plan I conceive to be altogether wrong,—wrong in the truth of things, and wrong in reference to Christian morality. Our religion should fear darkness more than light, blind authority and passive obedience more than inquisitiveness. Surely, Sir, after so many centuries spent in blaming Papal tactics, we are not now about to adopt them? Yet there is an extreme Puritanism in the Church, which is driving fast to the rocks which Protestants think they have for ever escaped. We cannot repress thought, but must rather give it a right direction. We must not hoodwink our fellow Christians, but rather tell them to look up again and again from the mists of error, until they see all things clearly. If the Author of Christianity has allowed the Gospels to relate the same events in different ways, as the accounts of the inscription upon the cross; or in apparently contradictory ways, as the narrative of the repentance and death of Judas; it is plain that if the Bible is read by the people these discrepancies must be discovered. Which is the safest plan in treating the questions which must arise from this state of things? Shall we affirm black to be white, or discord to be harmony, or variation to be identity; or, allowing the phenomena, shall we shew that our holy religion is perfectly independent of them, both in its origin, its developement, and its ends?

I must now draw my long letter to a close, and gather together the various and scattered threads of my

argument. On three great subjects, of vital interest to the Church, Lord Shaftesbury declaimed at Oxford, before a miscellaneous audience, and made assertions which were unbecoming, both as to their doctrine and spirit. What I have advanced proves that, whether my criticisms are right or wrong, that speech was suggestive to myself of serious objections, and I have felt bound to lay them before the public. If I have expressed myself warmly, it is because I have felt strongly; and if I have been obliged to treat somewhat harshly one whom I wish to respect, it is because the Church demands more attention from me than men, were they kings or princes. I believe Lord Shaftesbury means well, but so do those who differ from him; and one object of my addressing you will be gained if his Lordship and ourselves, and all who may read these observations, become more tolerant in opinion, and more careful and guarded in its expression. Perhaps it may also appear that the statements of speakers at public meetings are not to be taken for granted, and that the applause of a crowd is not always the test of truth.

I am, Sir,

Yours, with the greatest respect,

HENRY BURGESS.

Clifton Reynes, Newport Pagnel.

December 13th, 1856.

P.S. Since my letter was finished, I have met with so appropriate an illustration of the danger of demanding more than the Bible and the Church do, in our defence of Holy Scripture, that I cannot refrain from bringing it under your notice. The Rev. John Macnaught, in his *Essay on Inspiration*, has altogether denied any specific inspiration of the sacred writers, and maintained that the real difference between the writings of Isaiah and St. Paul, and Homer and Milton, is in the *subjects* treated of, and not in any higher degree of divine control over the minds of the former. In accordance with this theory, which is contrary both to what the Bible claims for itself, and to Catholic consent, Mr. Macnaught utters sentiments regarding the “Holy men of old who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,” most offensive to any devout mind, and most inconsistent with his position as a Minister of the Church of England. Thus, in reference to the expressions of St. Paul, in the fifteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, verses 19 and 32, he says:—

“Now, let it be gravely and piously asked, What do these passages state, and what do they teach? They state that, on the supposition of there being no compensation or reward in an after world, the persecuted life of a holy man—whose motto is, Overcome evil with good—is more unhappy than the existence of the most vicious or the most base, who escapes detection and flourishes in the sordid luxury of an unhallowed prosperity. They teach that, apart from the hope of reward and the dread of punishment, a life like that of Sardanapalus or of Tiberius at Capreae is preferable to that of Paul. On these principles, men who, like the Sadducees, had no firm grasp of a belief in the spirit-world, should have set themselves to gratify their animal desires and propensities, and would only have been carrying out the maxim as became them as

rational beings who were to end their existence after a while ! . . . Surely Paul knew better than this, his hypothetical teaching. He assuredly knew, and habitually taught, better than this exceptional and conditional teaching when he wrote to the Corinthians. . . . Grant this [*i. e.*, that the writings of the Apostles, &c., were fallible], and then, in these mournful utterances of the Apostle, you only find that he was well nigh overcome by evil, and for a moment was induced to write unadvisedly when he laboured under the vexatious questioning, and opposed the worldly-minded unbelief and want of spirituality, of those lucre-loving Corinthians.”

Here, then, is clearly an attack on the very substance or “subject matter” of revealed truth ; a procedure removed, *toto cælo*, from that of maintaining discrepancies in matters of lesser importance ; and, on this account, Lord Shaftesbury might justly have said that this writer “cuts away the ground from under us.”

The question then occurs, How is reasoning like Mr. Macnaught’s to be met ? By admitting his premises, but denying his conclusion. I would grant to him that the sacred writers are not infallible in accidentals, but would maintain that this does not in the least affect their infallibility in their great appointed work of religious teaching. I believe such works as his can never be satisfactorily answered but in this way ; and a proof of this is furnished by a little volume which professes to reply to “Macnaught on Inspiration,” by the Rev. J. B. Lowe, of Liverpool. The latter denies, for example, what Mr. Macnaught had asserted, “that there are two accounts of what gave to the field of blood its name of ‘Acedama.’” Now when St. Matthew tells us that the priests bought the field ; and St. Luke that Judas himself purchased it ; there are plainly two accounts of the



transaction which, with our light, can only be reconciled by violations of common honesty and common sense. I think Mr. Lowe should have admitted this at once, but have shewn that such a discrepancy has no bearing on the question of the inspiration of the Evangelists as religious teachers. He would then have disarmed his opponent, whereas now he has made him bolder in the use of his unlawful weapon. In a letter lately published he prints the two accounts of the purchase of Aceldama side by side, and triumphantly and truly taunts Mr. Lowe with the falseness of his denial! I do think we may say with great propriety on this subject,

Nec tali auxilio nec defensoribus istis  
*Causa eget.*

If we can maintain inspiration, as held by the sacred writers themselves, and by the Church, while we concede that they are not *infallible* in *every* point and particular, we break at once half the arrows in the quiver of infidelity.

H. B.

*December 16th.*

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#### ERRATA.

Page 21, line 16, for *paradoxies* read paradoxes  
 „ 23, „ 16, for *agitated* read agitated.







